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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a developing outdoor adventure program for at-risk adolescents in Cheltenham and Gloucester City (England). The program builds on a partnership between Youth Service, the schools, and other agencies, and aims to make contact with young people aged 13-17 at risk of drifting into crime; to provide appropriate experiences, support, and learning environments to facilitate personal development and change; and to ensure transferability and sustainability of new knowledge in the home environment. During the first year, young people were targetted directly or referred by other agencies, particularly schools, and two residential workers led outdoor adventure activities and developmental group work at Youth Service centers. Group work sessions were used to relate adventure experiences to other situations at home. Personal development profiles with self-assessment and action plans were produced by the young people. Following the residential experience, detached workers monitored the young people's progress and helped them to fulfill their action plans. One of the problems of the first year involved the transfer of young people from one worker to another. A restructured scheme allows for one detached and one residential worker to remain with each group from contact through followup. The needs of each group will be used to design its residential program. (SV)

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Gloucester Youth Action Scheme

SUE ROBERTSON

Sue is the Scheme Co-ordinator for the Gloucester Youth Action Scheme, a project co-funded by the Department of Education and Gloucestershire Youth Service.

Thank you for the opportunity of presenting what I feel is a new and exciting way of working with young people at risk.

This project arises from a successful bid by the Youth and Community Service in Gloucestershire made to the Department of Education Youth Action Scheme in 1993. The Scheme works with young people aged 13-17 at risk of drifting into crime and focuses on two principal urban conurbations, Gloucester and Cheltenham.

Both Cheltenham and Gloucester City consists of an established core of housing estates of pre- and post-war developments, plus suburban 1960s provision. These estates have limited recreational facilities and high unemployment and housing benefit rates - not the image usually associated with the area.

The project built on good partnership between the Youth Service and other agencies which already existed, such as schools, youth justice, probation, crime reduction steering group, young single homeless forum, Gloucester Council for Voluntary Youth Organisations, and the Home Tutors' Group.

The objectives of the scheme are:-

- To make contact and establish relationships with young people aged 13-17 at risk of drifting into crime;
- To provide appropriate experiences, support and learning environments to facilitate personal development and change;
- To ensure transferability and sustainability of new knowledge in the home environment.

The way we seek to achieve these is through running residential outdoor educational experiences. My role is as co-ordinator of the scheme.

The format of the project has recently changed so I will briefly outline the original structure and the reasons for change. The Youth Service already had two established detached Youth Work teams - in Gloucester and Cheltenham, and the workers were involved in the project as they were already working with the client group to some extent. Two residential workers were employed to deliver outdoor education and group work.

Young people were targeted directly or referred from other agencies, particularly schools - using a form called a participant pen portrait proforma (Fig. 1).

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Fig. 1

Participant Pen Portrait Proforma

Name _____ Course Dates _____

Age _____ School/Project _____

Please use the grid to describe the participant

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
Works alone										Team Worker
Lacking confidence										Confident
Gives up easily										Determined
Unsure										Decision (sure)
Inconsiderate										Considerate of others
Disorganised										Organised
Inflexible to change										Adaptable to change
Not responsible										Responsible
Ignores others opinions										Accepts others opinions
Poor communicator										Communicates well
Reluctant to participate										Willing to participate

Please also comment briefly on the following:-

Behaviour
Relationships with - Peers - Adults
Strengths/Potential
Medical comments
Other issues to be addressed
Why are you referring this individual?

Staff name _____ Signed _____

Residentials took place in the Youth Service's centres in the Forest of Dean and our Water Sports Centre near Cirencester. The residential workers were qualified in climbing, mountain leading, canoeing, sailing and windsurfing. Activities were used as part of the programme of developmental group work - caving, climbing, abseiling, problem solving in the outdoors, orienteering, mountain bikes, sailing, raft building, and night exercises.

One of the main aims of the residentials was to get the young people to co-operate together to achieve something and to try different roles. Many of them felt an enormous sense of achievement. Group work sessions were used to relate what happened - for instance while out caving - to what happens in other situations at home. The Residential aimed to give the young people some new hard skills and soft ones of valuing others, patience, assertiveness etc. Personal development profiles with tutor, peer and self-assessment and action plans were produced by the young people.

Following the Residential, detached workers did follow up work with the young people to help them to sustain the skills acquired on the Residentials and fulfil their action plans.

Young people's progress through the scheme was monitored and recordings made of follow-up work done by workers. Youth justice monitored offending behaviour before and after the scheme. Monitoring showed that all our courses contained young people already known to the court system. Out of 139 young people up to January, 60 were known to the courts. Eleven have offended again and 3 have offended who were not known before. We need a control group to compare this to see if it means anything but so far this is a positive outcome.

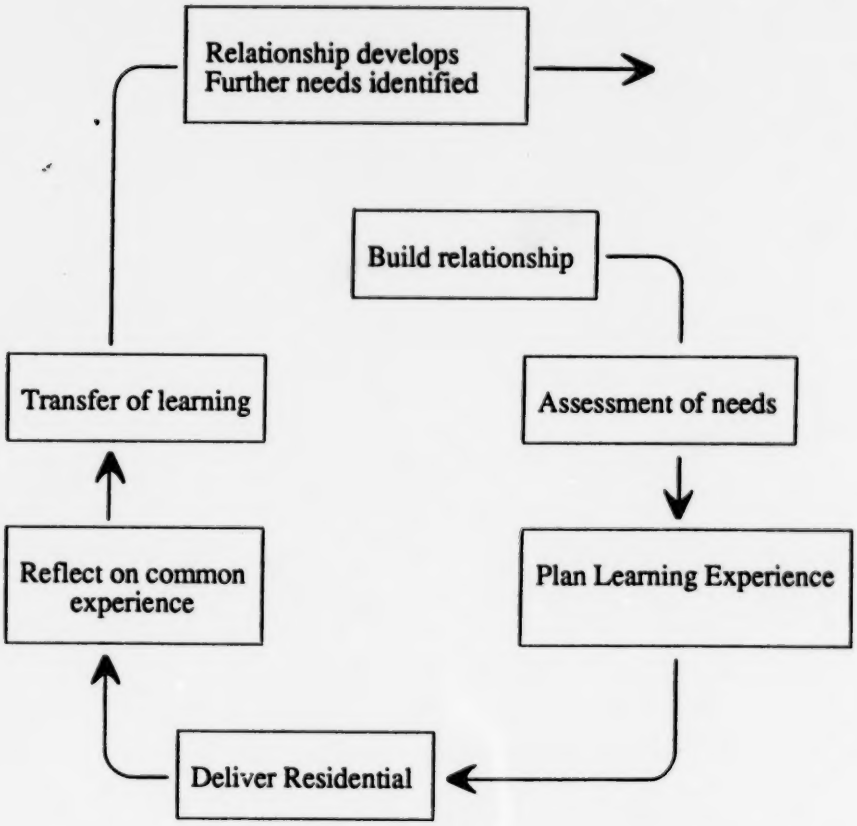
One of the problems that arose in our first year was the compartmentalisation of the scheme in the way young people experienced being referred from worker to worker. Also due to the pressure of filling 20 courses in the year, many referrals were school groups who were not adequately prepared for the residential; the residential workers usually met them for a brief preparatory session and had limited information about them on which to work. Sometimes information about relationships within the group, eg about bullies and victims, was not given. The quality of the outdoor education delivered was very high but it was felt that this experience could be best built upon if a worker could be with the young person through the whole process.

The restructured scheme is now for a co-ordinator plus one residential worker. The preparation work will be done by the detached worker and the residential worker who both will then work with the young people on the residential. I will outline this process and then give details of the follow-up. (Fig. 2).

Initially the target young people will be contacted by detached Youth Workers, full/part-time. Young people who are referred by other agencies will also be met with by the detached workers; we anticipate that most groups will be identified by the detached workers as they meet young people on the streets but contact will be made with the school. Permission for the young person to go on the scheme is sought from the school and parents. The scheme is entirely voluntary for the young person and its aims and objectives are properly explained to them. Courses are usually mixed but we have run one girls-only course and are planning two this year - we feel single sex work with girls with female workers is often appropriate.

Fig. 2

SCHEMES LEARNING CYCLE



Within the boundaries of the values of the Service/in an environment appropriate to the identified learning needs

The needs of the young people will then be assessed in terms of the scheme; self-esteem, decision-making skills and communication skills are likely to be apparent. The workers also assess the present behaviour of the group - are they on the verge of offending, playing with drugs, being excluded from school, etc? What attitudes and behaviour needs to be challenged? - using the learning cycles as shown. This knowledge of the group will then be used to design a residential programme.

The Residential will be run on a developmental group work model beginning with consensus decision-making, using exercises to help young people talk about themselves, trust exercises - aiming to get the group to a stage where they make a contract to trust and support each other. Relating this back to their home experiences, throughout the four days a combination of group exercises and outdoor activities plus arts work will be used to help the young people begin to change what they recognise needs change - at the end of the residential the young people will take home a personal development profile of self, peer and tutor assessments and an action plan. The residential worker will record all work done during the Residential.

The detached worker continues to work with them for about two months. Follow-up work is done by full- and part-time detached youth workers, usually in evening sessions but sometimes in school time by arrangement. We try to ensure gender balance in our staffing and always ensure a female worker is available to work with the girls during and after the residential.

Work has ranged from in-depth counselling of individuals to opportunities being offered to join the local caving club. One particular group has spent time on Trax - a project for bike scrambling. Another group has been rock climbing and caving to build on their skills following experiences on the Residential. The follow-up work is based in the community and may involve the whole group who have been on the Residential or part of it at any one time plus peers.

Follow-up Residentials will be used where felt necessary for the group's development. Recordings are used to see how young people's attitude and behaviour changes over time. These recordings are discussed with Line Managers during supervision of workers.

Good relationships exist with the local schools and other agencies although there are issues about confidentiality which we are currently exploring with Youth Justice.

In outlining the scheme, I have tried to show how it meets the themes of this conference of targeting, progression, demonstrating change and community integration. Key for us are transferability and sustainability. Young people acquiring skills in outdoor activity situations which are useful in their home environment and which they can use in the future, and learning how to be assertive rather than aggressive is one example.